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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001372

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#), [PGOV](#), [MOPS](#), [PINR](#), [BM](#)

SUBJECT: TOUGH(ER) GUYS MOVE UP IN RANGOON: BIOGRAPHIC  
INFORMATION ON THE NEW PRIME MINISTER AND S-1

REF: A. RANGOON 1370

[B](#). RANGOON 1359

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1, (C) Summary: The two SPDC members promoted in the shuffle that led to Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's "retirement" in Rangoon on October 19 have apparently been chosen primarily for their loyalty to Senior General Than Shwe and their willingness to subordinate themselves to him. They have also shown themselves to be ruthless, opportunistic operators. Biographic information on the promoted officials follows. End Summary.

[12](#). (C) Lieutenant-General Soe Win, General Khin Nyunt's replacement as Prime Minister of Burma, has advanced his career and reputation as a capable, loyal supporter of the Burmese strongman, Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Cunning and ambitious, he has shown willingness to go the extra mile for the Senior General and those closest to him. There are credible reports that he directed the May 2003 attack in Depayin on Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters.

[13](#). (C) After joining the SPDC in 1997, Soe Win was promoted to "Secretary Two" and rapidly advanced to "Secretary One" in August 2003. He has consolidated his power base as a "patron" of the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), the regime's mass organization and political arm (and a pet project of General Than Shwe). He is said to now control the entire USDA organization. Unlike the deposed Khin Nyunt, who had a strong following among his former subordinates in the now bruised military intelligence (MI) wing of the armed forces, the new Prime Minister has formed his primary power base among civilians in the USDA. He had previously demonstrated ability to deal effectively with civilians while serving as the military commander in Monywa. He has also shown a flair for the dramatic, pulling himself out from a pile of troops who had been killed--while under his command--in a battle with communist forces in the '80s. This earned him the nickname, "Strong Life."

[14](#). (C) Born in the Shan State on May 10, 1949, the newly appointed Prime Minister graduated from the Defense Services Academy in 1970. While holding the rank of Major in 1988, he commanded Light Infantry Division (LID)-22 under Lt. General Tin Hla (Deputy Prime Minister for Military Affairs, 2000-2001). LID-22 played an important role in the crackdown on the 1988 uprising for democracy. Unconfirmed reports suggest that then Major Soe Win issued the order to fire the first shots at City Hall on August 8, 1988.

[15](#). (C) The new Prime Minister was quoted by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) in January 2003 as saying the SPDC would "never negotiate with Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD." This comment was reportedly made at a meeting of the USDA with local authorities and civil servants in mid-January 2003, well before the May 2003 attack. He has also reportedly said that Burma can rely on China to protect it against the United States.

[16](#). (U) Lt. General Soe Win is married to Than Than Hwe, but little else is known about his personal life. He has delivered public addresses in understandable English, but is said to have limited ability to speak the language extemporaneously.

Lieutenant-General Thein Sein--Another Loyal Follower of the Senior General

[17](#). (C) Lieutenant-General Thein Sein has been chosen to move up from "Secretary Two" to replace Soe Win as "Secretary One" in the SPDC. By all accounts a quiet personality who shuns the spotlight, he was born on April 20, 1945 in Patheingyi, Irrawaddy Division. In 1988, then Major Thein Sein served as commander of Light Infantry Division (LID)-55, one of the elite organizations loyal to the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP). In that capacity, he distinguished himself, as did Soe Win, in the crackdown against the 1988 uprising in support of democracy.

[17](#). (SBU) In late 1996, Thein Sein was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and assigned to the then newly formed

Triangle Region Command in Kengtung. He became a member of the SPDC in 1997. In 2001, after being promoted to Major General, he was transferred to Rangoon and assigned to the post of Adjutant General. In this capacity, he was responsible for the MoD's business interests. He was appointed "Secretary Two" of the SPDC on August 25, 2003. As are Prime Minister Soe Win and other members of the SPDC, Thein Sein is a "patron" of the USDA (note: The organization's "patrons" form, in effect, its policy making body). He is also Chairman of the National Convention Commission, Chairman of the Central Organizing Committee for War Veterans, Chairman of the Committee on Prevention of Recruitment of Child Soldiers, and Chairman of the Police Reform Committee. He is slated to accompany Senior General Than Shwe to India on October 24.

18. (U) The new "Secretary One" is married to Khin Khin Win, who is not known to have any important political connections. He is thought to have limited English ability and little, if any, experience in the West.  
Martinez